DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP SYMPHONY: THE INTERPLAY OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP STYLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study aimed at exploring formal/positional female leadership perceptions /conceptualisation and styles of educational leadership. For in-depth exploration, this study explored the perception and leadership styles of public sector girls' college principal. The college was selected using purposive sampling strategy as the college is one of the growing colleges. Employing purposive sampling strategy, the principal of the college was invited to take part in the study. An interview protocol was developed to guide the process of open-ended interview for exploration of participants' perception and styles of leadership. The findings reveal that the participant demonstrates blended perspectives on educational leadership. She demonstrates an interplay between culturally responsive and future-ready leadership practices. The findings also suggest that the interplay between autocratic and democratic, transformational and transactional leadership approaches show the participants' blended approach of leadership styles. She is democratic at one time and autocratic at another time. Her style of leadership is often situational, and she respond to the situation and needs. The positional female leadership is showcasing a range of leadership styles, and these styles harmonize /interact with each other in different situation and times like instruments in a symphony orchestra.

INTRODUCTION

The role and responsibilities of educational leadership is highly vital for the success in Higher Education Institutions (HEI). This is why the notion of leadership is contested and much debated in leadership literature. The notion has evolved with the passage of time.

Leadership is defined in terms of traits, characteristics, and behaviours (Avolio, 1999; Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May; 2004)**.** Leadership is defined as an act not a role; hence it is defined the ability to convince others to act. It is the ability to use skills to influence others. Therefore, leadership skills such as behaviour and action is considered a determinant factor for making an educational organization successful (McCrimmon, 2006).

The role of leadership is important in making any organization a growing organization. For example, leadership in higher education institutions influence the nature of relationship, learning atmosphere, teamwork culture and educational process that ensure quality education and organizational productivity and developing productive graduates. The nature of relationships with leader in turn influences employees' job satisfaction, turnover, positive relationships and wellbeing of followers contributing to organizational productivity (Parish, 2013).

In educational leadership literature multiple styles of formal leadership have been discussed. Among the diverse forms of leadership, one form

of leadership is called formal or positional leadership, and the other form of leadership is informal leadership. All the other styles of leadership fall under the formal or positional leadership or informal and fluid concept of leadership. A formal leader by the virtue of the position has the authority to make/control decisions, control the career of the employees and take disciplinary actions (Carpenter, Beur and Erdugan, 2010).

General observation also confirms the above-mentioned leadership behaviours. Mostly formal and positional leaders show traditional behaviour in the organization, use autocratic leadership style and harshly treat their subordinates / employees. They take decisions and do not give importance to subordinates' inputs and suggestions, always keep a gape from their employees, decide alone about everything and give orders to the subordinates to complete the tasks on time. They influence on their employees and subordinate through punishment by using unilateral or top-down communication.

Contrary to formal leadership, informal leaders are not in a formal position of leadership but recognized as a leader nevertheless for relying on" authentic leading authority" rather than "power wielding" tactics available to formal leaders (Pielistik, 2000). Informal leaders exert influence over the group members based on the wisdom, knowledge, and expertise (Schnier & Goktepe, 1982). However, it is noting worthy that formal leadership style is also changing with the passage of time. Positional leaders are also becoming democratic in their practices. They are developing positive relationship with followers and try to develop the organization with the support of their followers. There is a need to explore whether formal / positional female leader in a higher education institute display autocratic leadership style or tended towards more informal democratic leadership styles. In this context I am interested to explore the leadership style of a female principal / positional leader in one of the growing public sector girl's degree colleges.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions the study seeks to answer:

1. How does the formal leader understand / perceive the notion of leadership in the context of the college?
2. What leadership styles does the formal leader display in the context of the college?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership is defined and conceptualised differently by different gurus. There are contested meanings of leadership in higher education that need to be understood and considered. If we provide the summary of leadership definition and conceptualisation discussed in leadership literature, we find different conceptualisations of leadership. For instance, some have defined leadership as position; others have defined leadership as performance; yet others have conceptualised leadership as practice and leadership as professional role model (Junstrasook, 2014). Another important conceptualisation of leadership is that leadership is not a solo act rather it is a team effort. It involves a sharp interaction of many factors like values, organizational goals, individual working preference and organizational rules and structure (Charles & Towley, 2001).

There is considerable impact of leadership style on organizational performance and organizational improvement. Leadership style influences the organizational culture which, in return, influences the educational performance (Klien et al, 2013). This impact is gender neutral. The educational literature shows that historically, leadership has been construed primarily as a masculine enterprise, and many theories of leadership have focused on the desirability of stereotypically masculine qualities in leaders (e.g., Miner, 1993). However, like the change in the meanings of leadership this masculine nature of leadership construct has also been changed and women are also expected to be effective leaders (Eagly, 1989 & Eagly, 2007).

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Leadership styles have been recognized as an important factor in organizational progress and development. Different educational leaders use different styles to inspire, influence and guide followers. Leadership style is a combination of different characteristics, traits and behaviour that are used by leaders for interacting with their subordinates. Some equate the style of leadership with the creation of vision, mission, objectives, and organizational policies corresponding to the changes occurring in the external environment (Xu & Wang, 2009; Harris, 2007). Monga and Coeteze, (2012) define leadership style as the kind of relationship that is used by an individual to make people work together for a common goal or objectives.

It also refers to the behaviours or techniques used by a leader to create an environment where all the members of the group work together to achieve common goal.

Leadership literature discusses different leadership styles. Transformational leaders serve as role models for group members, empower and encourage them to be creative and improve their capabilities (Eagly et al, 2003 & Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Transformational leaders nurture caring, considerate, and co-operative behaviours (Cuadrado, Navas, Molero, Ferrer, & Morales, 2012; Eagly & Carli, 2003), are more people-oriented as compared to task-oriented Martin, (2015), inspire followers to develop leadership capabilities, seeks to build the organizational capacity supporting and leading changes in teaching learning practices (Rowe, 2007 & Oyetunyi, 2007), play a key role in creating positive school culture (Leithwood, 1999), have the ability to motivate and to encourage intellectual stimulation through vision and inspiration (Avolio, 2004; Raffery & Griffin, (2004). The transformational leader demonstrates emotional intelligence and consultative and collaborative style that supports academics to perform effectively (Bryman, 2007 & Parish, 2013).

Contrary to transformational leaders, transactional leaders are characterized by emphasizing the exchange of rewards and monitoring group members' performance for mistakes (Eagly et al, 2003 & Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005), show assertiveness, instrumental competence, and

dominance (Cuadrado, Navas, Molero, Ferrer, & Morales, 2012; Eagly & Carli, 2003), more task-oriented as against people-oriented (Martin, 2015), focus precisely on direct coordination, control and supervision of the curriculum and instruction (Rowe, 2007), make

choices based on his/her own ideas and judgment and rarely accept advises from followers

(Bilal and Maqsood, 2013), reward and punishment is the tool to get things done by followers (Cherry, 2005). To conclude it ca be argued that transactional leaders are somehow same as autocratic leaders in their approaches and mostly take decision by their own and

inputs from staff are hardly taken into consideration (Baughman, 2008).

Democratic leadership style is distinct from autocratic leadership in that democratic leaders allow and encourage participation in decision-making processes (Eagly, 2017 & Carli, 2003),

involve groups or employees in policy making, consult and communicate with various people in the organization in decision-making process (Heenan & Bennis, 1999), gives equal

importance to each member in the organization and uses multidirectional communication to change ideas between employees and leader enhances staff morale to high degree (Mba,

2004), allows members of the group to take active and more participative role in decision making process, staffs are more active and innovative, and it results in increasing in productivity (Rositer, 2007).

Instructional leadership emphasises on understanding students'learning needs, creating enabling environment, and applying pedagogies that promote students learning

(Halen & Printy, 2003). Instructional leaders aim at improving students learning (Hellinger, (2011). Its focus is on teachers' professional development, where the professional knowledge, skills and competencies of educators are enhanced (Hart, 1999). To sum up, instructional leadership is set of leadership practices that involve planning, evaluating, coordinating, and improving teaching and learning. It is also referred to as learning-centred leadership (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). instructional leaders rely on coaching instead of coercion, build harmony, and value input and participation (Johnson, 2002).

Situational leadership style suggests that a leader's success relies on his/her ability to adapt leadership style to suite their employees' level of maturity and situation. Situational leadership emphasize on leadership approach that is both a directive and supportive, and each behaviour must be applied appropriately in a given situation. To determine what is needed in a particular situation, a leader must evaluate his/her employees and assess how competent and committed they are to perform the given task. Based on the assessment of employees' skills and motivation; situational leaders follow the directive or supportive role to meet the changing needs of subordinates (Northhouse, 2007). Situational leadership styles are divided into four parts, namely, high- directed and low support leader behaviour; high-level leader's behaviour and high support; highly supportive and low leader behaviour and low leaders' behaviour of support and direction (Silverthorn & Wang, 2001).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is a qualitative case study. Case study was appropriate to investigate the leadership style of institutional head within its real-life context that is college context (Yin, 2013). The case study allowed me report and interpret only a single variable of leadership style (Eckstien, 2002). This design allowed me to develop in-depth understanding of the case that is the exploration of leadership style of a formal educational leader (Cresswell, 2002). This research was conducted in one of the public sector girls' colleges. The college offers BS degree programs in various disciplines. At the time of the conduction of the study the college had the population of 1270 students and 40 teachers among them 16 visiting teachers and 24 are regular lecturers. In this study a formal female leader of public sector girls' college of lower Chitral participated. She has been in this college for 15 years as a lecturer and in 2016 she become the principal of the college. The data was collected through semi structured interview. The participant was interviewed two times of 60 minutes long and then a short gap-filling interview of 20 minutes was conducted. Following the suggestions of Miles and Huberman (2019) data analysis first, I transcribed the recorded data, followed by organization of data while reading and rereading followed by coding the segments of data into different codes and developing the codes into different categories and themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study was to explore participant's perception of leadership. We explored her conceptualisation of leadership in detail with repeated probes. The following section presents participants' perceptions and understanding of leadership. Culturally

RESPONSIVE AND FUTURE-READY LEADERSHIP

The participant combines two critical aspects of educational leadership roles. She is sensitive to culturally responsive role of leadership on one hand and preparing students for the needs of the 21st century on the other hand. This finding shows the interplay of culturally responsive and futuristic leadership understanding. She conceptualised leadership as: Leadership is guiding a group of people or organization in such a way that the culture of the group is maintained in the organization, and progress is made. A good leader is one who is aware of the culture of the community to which the institution is serving adapts the needs of changing times while preserving his/her cultural values because it is human nature not to be static but also not to forget one's culture. A good educational leader is one who follows his/her culture and guide his/her staff to follow, understand and promote their culture and make progress with the passage of time (Participant Interview).

The participant perceives it mandatory for a leader to guide his/her followers, but this guidance is conditioned with the protection and preservation of the collective culture in which the institution operates. The participant also seems aware of the need of the changing time and consider it important for a leader to be aware of the changing needs in the changing time but again she seems sensitive to adapt the change to fit in the change into the broader cultural frame as a refence point. The participants' cultural sensitivity as an educational leader is congruent with what Cheng, (1993) highlights that culture is very important for institution and it affect each aspect of it. Such as unity, cohesion, stability and the ability for adjustment in organization.

The participant seems culturally sensitive and considers cultural preservation, promotion, and protection one of the prime responsibilities of a leader. The culturally sensitive approach of the participants is extremely consistent with Terrell and Lindsey's (2008) advice to leadership in educational institutions to create an environment where teachers / educators understand, respond, incorporate, accommodate and ultimately celebrate the entirety of the children they serve, including their languages and literacies, spiritual universes, cultures, racial proclivities, behavior, knowledge, critical thoughts, and appearance.

The participant considers it an integral leadership competence to be aware of institutional vision, beliefs, philosophies, norms, expectations, and ceremonies within the broader cultural frame. This is consistent with Hoy and Miskel's (2001) argument that culture as shared orientations hold the unit together and give it a unique identity. She is aware that culture is dynamic, but she thinks that a leaders must be culturally sensitive, and his/her prime responsibility is to promote desirable cultural values. These findings are consistent with the findings of Irvin, (2002) and Ware, (2006) that cultural responsiveness is the responsibility of educational leadership.

The emphasis of the participant that educational institutions need to promote cultural norms is also congruent with the previous research findings that educational leaders should have the ability to articulate a vision that support and preserves the broader cultural norms and sustains culturally responsive teaching. The studies suggest that culturally responsive teacher education preparation should be introduced in educational institutions even when teachers are from same cultural, racial, and socioeconomic background (Irvin 2002 & Ware, 2006).

The above data also reveals that the participant is also sensitive to play futuristic leadership role while preparing students for the changing global landscape. She urges upon preservation and protection of students' culture on one hand, but she also emphasise to prepare students for needs of globalized world. This finding is congruent with the findings of Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) who discusses the need for leadership that prepares students for a dynamic and changing educational landscape and changing needs in changing times.

INTERPLAY OF AUTOCRATIC AND PARTICIPATIVE LEADERSHIP

The exploration of leadership style was another purpose of the study. The data shows that the participant is always tilted to different leadership styles at different times rather than sticking to only one dominant leadership style. The following excerpt describes her approach in which she integrates autocratic and democratic leadership styles while making decisions.

She explains that:

I think fair decision making is a tough task for a leader because decisions are made for the betterment of institutions. I seek suggestions from my staff before taking any decision. Sometimes my decisions are based on the suggestions of the employees and sometimes I make decision by my own (Participant Interview). The participant claims to make decision seeking suggestions from her concerned staff. This reflects her democratic and participative leadership style. However, she seems keep changing her leadership style. As she admits that she makes decision on her own despite seeking suggestions from concerned staff. This shows that she demonstrates democratic leadership one time and autocratic leadership style at another time. This shift is again depending on her understanding and evaluation of the situation. These findings are consistent with what

Northouse (2021) argues that leaders often blend different styles depending on the context, highlighting the dynamic between directive (autocratic) and inclusive (participative) approaches in leadership practices.

The following interview excerpt also reflects a combination of autocratic and distributed leadership styles as a leader. She explains that:

Sometimes I delegate tasks to different people based on their capabilities/skills. We make an annual calendar every year and, in that calendar, we mention every task and then we make annual duty list, in which we assign the responsibilities to each staff such as responsibility to monitor teaching, controller's responsibilities, in charge of cleanliness, in charge of furniture procurement and renovation, transport and hostel responsibilities etc. However, as a principal I monitor whether the work is being carried out the way I want (Participant interview)

These findings are consistent with the findings of Awan and Mahmood, (2010) who state that an effective leader organizes and delegates the tasks in organization to followers to achieve a common goal and mission.

Interplay of Transactional and Transformational Leadership Styles

The participant also seem to switch between transactional and transformational leadership styles. Her emphasis on the observance of rules and approach to deal with people in different ways in different times reflects this interplay.

I always follow rules and policies strictly to promote quality of education in my college. I always try to understand the psychology of my staff before I give them any task. I always appreciate is someone does a good thing and penalize if they commit mistakes. It is important to be rude, because motivation and punishment are both important to get things done from employees. Sometimes a word of appreciation works to motivate a person but sometimes it becomes much necessary to cut some one's salary to make them active (Participant Interview).

The data reveals that she believes in following rules religiously. This approach is good to avoid unwanted situation, but it also limits the possibility of organizational change. She over-emphasizes organizational rules and this single focus on rules is a hindering factor to bring about innovation and change in the institution for improving the quality of education. These findings consistent with the findings of

Mazurkiewicz, (2009) who argues that leadership in educational institution should not be single focused showing concern on one aspect and ignoring others. Roger, (2003) support this by arguing that leadership needs to see over and beyond for educational institutions for innovation to take place and s/he must have skills to manage change and innovation.

The analysis of the above excerpt reflects that the participant perceives an effective leader who adapts their style of leading to suit the current work environment and needs of the team. She moves between two extremes of leadership styles-the interplay between transactional and transformational leadership styles. That is the reason she uses the trick of carrot and stick to get things done by the followers. She appreciates, encourages, and acknowledges the good work and she even does not hesitate to deduct from the salary of an employee in case she breaks any rule.

The most critical finding is that the participant is more inclined to situational leadership style. She believes in effectiveness of situational leadership styles and this belief is significantly reflecting from all the data. She seems using this style every time. She becomes consultative to decide, but she tends to make decision based on her own judgment at the end. She delegates power but then she also limits the freedom of followers to do the things their own way. She certainly believes in appreciation and acknowledgment of staff doing good job by giving reward but at the same time she becomes too autocratic and deducts the salary of any employee violating rule of the institution. The finding is that the participant believes and practice situational leadership. The above finding is consistent with the finding of Hersey et.al (1996) theory of situational leadership that indicates that an effective leader uses different leadership styles according to the situation and the maturity level of the subordinates. The finding is also congruent with Graeff, (1997) who argues that a situational leader behaves uses different leadership styles according to maturity level of the followers/ subordinates.

Conclusion

The perceptions and leadership styles of a principal of a public girls' college were examined in this study. The participant demonstrated a complex and multidimensional leadership style(s). The principal is combines culturally sensitive and forward-thinking approaches in her leadership style and hence a prime example of a blended approach to educational leadership. Her leadership style is defined by a combination of transformational and transactional, autocratic and democratic approaches. More often she demonstrates situational leadership style responding to a range of situations and conditions differently.

The findings imply that her leadership is dynamic rather than static, according to the demands of certain circumstances. This situational flexibility demonstrates a harmonious synthesis of many leadership philosophies. This adaptability makes the principal successful in handling the challenges of her position and exemplifies her a thorough and situation-specific style of educational leader. This study emphasizes how crucial it is for educational institutions to comprehend and support these mixed leadership styles, especially in contexts that are culturally and contextually varied.

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